

# Anarchism & the E.Z.L.N.



*Anarchist Reprint Series*



*The powerful want our silence.*

*When we were silent, we died, without the word we did not exist.*

*We fight against this loss of memory, against death and for life.*

*We fight the fear of a death because we have ceased to exist in memory.*

4th Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle

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Feb. 1998

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## About the Anarchist Ideas Pamphlet Series

The Anarchist Ideas Pamphlet Series recycles old articles which have become difficult to obtain but we consider to be very useful for anarchists to read. Much of this material will originally have been published by the Workers Solidarity Movement but we are also including articles written by others where they contain a lot of useful information or particularly provoking arguments. Obviously this does not indicate that we agree 100% with the original material. Your feedback on the material we choose to cover or suggestions for areas we should cover would be appreciated.

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# Introduction

The EZLN first appeared in the public eye on January the first 1994 when they seized control of four towns in Chaipas, south-east Mexico. Proclaiming that "Enough is Enough" they ransacked the town halls and burnt the land deeds in a gesture familiar from centuries of peasant revolutionary movements.

When the army counter attacked they retreated into the jungle until national pressure forced the government to call a cease-fire. This left the Zapatistas in control of a huge swathe of territory running to the Guatemalan border. They took over the rich land of the ranchers in this area and the indigenous communities started to work it.

The EZLN or Zapatistas were immediately noticed by anarchists the world over, they flew a red and black flag, they named themselves after Mexican anarchist Zapata and they explicitly said they were not trying to seize power.

This pamphlet deals with the first attempts to understand where the Zapatistas are coming from based on their earliest documents and a long and detailed interview with Sub-Comandante Marcos that pulls no punches on the difficult questions of sexism, nationalism and the structures of decision making. It highlights both the enormous potential and the flaws of the new politics the Zapatistas are putting forward.

Since this interview and the documents the article is based on the Zapatistas have come under close scrutiny from many quarters and to an extent are a lot more guarded about what they say in terms of existing politics. They have also started to exercise a massive influence outside of the jungles and mountains of Chiapas.

They arose in an age where hope had crumbled for many people who had spent long periods of their life opposing capitalism. They have come to explain how they entered the mountains as Maoists but were forced to re-evaluate that doctrine in the light of indigenous beliefs and the changing reality of the outside world.

For the period when the EZLN was building in the state of Chiapas was also the period when Leninism as an ideology was collapsing, particularly in 1989 with the fall of the Berlin wall. It was also the period where social democracy internationally implemented cuts and oppression on behalf of capitalism. Hence the collapse of hope by all those who had looked to these systems.

It may be that the lasting contribution the EZLN make is by becoming a beacon of hope in the 1990's they are becoming a way in which activists are finding their way to libertarian politics. One demonstration of the scale of this influence was the attendance by some 3,000 - 4,000 people at an international conference organised in the jungle in July of 1996.

For anarchists this has to represent a way of winning many of these people to anarchism. This is another contribution of this pamphlet for in order to involve ourselves in the dialogue around the EZLN we have to understand the language it is conducted in and the key issues it revolves around.



# Who was Emiliano Zapata?

[From Red & Black Revolution No. 1]

Emiliano Zapata was from the Morelos region. He joined the army after being caught as a highway man. His other option was to be shot. After his release in 1910 he supported the Liberals and had to take to the hills when they lost the elections despite having more votes. He was now the leader of an army of peasants and they fought and defeated the tyrant Don Porphyry. Then the liberal Francisco Madero came to power and he spoke of freedom of the Press and Democratic elections. Zapata published a charter which called for 'Land and Liberty.' Despite the charter not much changed and eventually power struggles broke out again.

In the course of the following years Zapata in the south and Pancho Villa in the north defeated many power mongers who tried to grip the reins of power. Yet, despite many opportunities Zapata never took control himself. A strong people do not need a government he once said. Zapata was influenced by the manifesto drawn up by Ricardo Flores Magon {Mexico's leading Anarchist at the time who went on to die in an American Prison}. In the manifesto issued by Zapata and signed by 35 officers in August 1914 he wrote "*It (the country) wishes to destroy with one stroke the relationships of lord and serf, overseer and slave, which in the matter of agriculture are the only ones ruling from Tamaulipas to Chiapas and from Sonora to Yucatan.*" During the revolution the Zapistas destroyed public papers, deeds, property transfers, titles and mortgages in the hope that the land would return to the only true owners, the people. In 1918 Zapata was lured into an ambush and killed. Evidently there are some in Chiapas who still wish to destroy the relationship which Zapata spoke of 80 years ago





# What is the EZLN?

[From Red & Black Revolution No. 1]

The name of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) rebels is taken from the Emiliano Zapata who played a major role in the Mexican Revolution (1910 - 1921). 73 years has passed since the Mexican Revolution. The memory of Zapata had faded onto the worn pages of history. Indeed the heirs of the betrayers of Zapata, headed by the Institutional Revolutionary Party and President Carlos Salinas, are in power today in Mexico. They have remained in power for the last 75 years. But the Zapatistas have come back to haunt them.

## A New Year a New Dawn.

On New Years Day of 1994 people awoke to the news that four towns in the south-eastern state of Chiapas had been taken over by a group calling itself the Zapatista National Liberation Army. Militarily they had timed their strike against the Mexican army well and thus even managed to capture General Abslon Castellanos (former Chiapas Governor). Initially they took San Cristobal de Las Casas then Oxchuc a town 36km away. They ransacked 10 government offices. They freed 179 prisoners from the prison in San Cristobal and attacked the army garrison on January 2nd.

*They stated: We have nothing to lose, absolutely nothing, no decent roof over our heads, no land, no work, poor health, no food, no education, no right to freely and democratically choose our leaders, no independence from foreign interests, and no justice for ourselves or our children. But we say enough is enough! We are the descendants of those who truly built this nation, we are millions of dispossessed, and we call upon all our brethren to join our crusade, the only option to avoid dying of starvation !*

On January 4th the big guns hit back. Ten towns in the surrounding area of San Cristobal were bombed. Reports came in of at least 400 killed in the bombing. Five reported EZLN rebels were found dead in Ocosingo. In another town, the Zapatistas shot down a helicopter, burned down the city hall and then left. The bodies of 38 people who had been killed by the federal army were found. The next day 70 tanks arrived in the conflict zone and the army attacked a van killing 5 civilians including one 8 year old girl. Various government ministries circulated black propaganda about the group labelling them radical with a professional foreign leadership. The authorities also stated that the presence of human rights organisations hinders the dismantling of such a movement.

## Why Chiapas ?

The EZLN is based amongst the indigenous people who live in and around the jungle of Lacandona, east of the high plains of Chiapas. Chiapas is an atrociously poor area. 41% of the population have no running water. 34.9% are without electricity. 63% of the people live in accommodation of only one room. 19% of the labour force has no possible income and 67% of the labour force live on or below the minimum wage - in Mexico you can take this as being very little. Despite Article 27(1) which promises Land Reform in the constitution nothing has happened in this area. President Salinas recently changed Article 27 further wiping out any hopes for agrarian reform. Northern Mexico has developed factories to cater



for companies making use of cheap labour. The southern part of Mexico has been left to become a wilderness. The EZLN fears that NAFTA(2) (North American Free Trade Agreement) will keep Chiapas further isolated and underdeveloped.

After the first initial days of hostilities the EZLN withdrew to the Lacandona jungle where they now are involved in negotiations. A cease-fire which began on January 17th has held despite the army breaking on a number of occasions. In February negotiations took place inside a belt composing of representatives from the NGO's (non-governmental agencies). Invitations were issued to the various political parties asking them to participate in the peace talks. No weapons have been handed over to the Mexican army.

The State adopted a more conciliatory approach after the international condemnation of the bombing raid on January 5th. The move towards negotiation seems only to have come about due to the light of international attention, as prior to this Mexico's record in human rights is a diabolical one.

Torture was frequently used by law-enforcement agents particularly the state and judicial police, throughout Mexico. Most victims were criminal suspects but some including leaders of indigenous communities and human rights activists were apparently targeted solely for their peaceful political activities.(3) As of February '94 the Secretariat of Human rights of the main opposition party - Party of Democratic Revolution (PRD) - reported that 263 of their members, activists and supporters have been assassinated since the 1988 electoral campaign.

The EZLN rejected a request to drop political points from the agenda saying that they were not going to force national agreements but that as Mexicans they had a right to form opinions and to protest about aspects of Mexico's political life. In this letter they go on to say that Peace without respect and dignity continues to be, for us, an undeclared war of the powerful against our people. They then went on to show their willingness for 'peace with dignity' by withdrawing from certain towns and letting the International Red Cross move in and take control declaring them 'grey areas'. They also said that they would allow free passage of civilians while maintaining mobile patrols to ensure no military, police, or





government officials entered the 'grey zones'.

In another statement issued to national newspapers the EZLN asked Why is everyone so quiet? Is this the 'democracy' you wanted? Complicity with lies? Going on to say How much blood must be spilt before they (PRI) understand that we want respect not charity ? The statement finishes with the important lines

The CCRI-CG (Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee General Command) of the EZLN will go to the negotiating table with reservation because of its lack of confidence of the federal government. They want to buy us with a ton of promises. They want us to sell the only thing we have left : dignity. The 1st of January was not enough for the government to learn to speak to its citizens as equals. It seems that more than January 1 are necessary. ....Here Zapata lives. Try to assassinate him again. Our blood is a pledge. That it be taken by he who is still ashamed.

They also issued a communique to all the NGO's operating within the conflict zone saying that they continued to respect and welcome their neutrality and humanitarian efforts.

The month of February and March is littered with accounts of the spreading popularity of the EZLN. There was a march of 300kms by nearly 200 indigenous people to the outskirts of Mexico city. Banners displayed read This dialogue we don't understand which was a reference to the massacre of students in 1968 and the more recent one in Chiapas. A demonstration for agrarian reform in Oaxaca was attacked by police. Students calling themselves 'Zapatistas' protested at a stop by the presidential candidate of the PRI. In Puebla local indigenous groups blocked the highway. In Tamaulipas dissident oil workers at the state petro-chemical industry (PIMEX) broke with their unions and organised strikes, blockades and demonstrations at the plants. Unarmed Indians have staged land take-overs in the state of Chiapas - throughout the Mayan Highlands. There are reports that over 120,000 hectares of land has been expropriated from large private land owners(5). On April 10th, 77 years after the death of Emiliano Zapata large demonstrations were organised and took place in support of EZLN demands in Mexico city. In June the EZLN rejected a peace offer set forth by the Government.

Declaration of the Jungle issued by the EZLN

*We call upon Article 39 of the Mexican Constitution which states 'the people have at all times the inalienable right to alter or change the nature of their government.' Therefore in accordance with our Constitution, we issue this DECLARATION OF WAR... People of Mexico, we call for your total participation in this struggle for work, land, housing, food, health care, education, independence, liberty, democracy, justice and peace.*

### **Where are they coming from ?**

*We are not Marxists, nor are we guerrillas. We are Zapatistas and we are an army.* EZLN Major

The first days of 1994 saw the resurgence of the name of Zapata on the airwaves of the world. The EZLN, are only the most public face of the Chiapas conflict. The EZLN act as an army, under the direction of a larger organisation, the CRIC-GC . The CRIC-GC is comprised of delegates from many indigenous communities and it is they who are responsible for the politics and organisation of the EZLN. The CRIC-GC is the highest authority of the movement. The EZLN is subservient to them and exists to carry out their wishes.



Major Benjamin of the EZLN says *We are not Maoists or Marxists, sir. We are a group of campesinos, workers and students for whom the government has left no other path than arms to resolve our ancestral problems.*(6)

To understand what being a Zapatista means one has to go back to the origins of today's EZLN. In 1983 twelve young people entered Chiapas to organise the oppressed population. A vital lesson taught to these young people was that of democratic organisation. Sub Comandante Marcos revealed *The Zapatista army was not born democratic, it was born as a political military organisation. But as it grew the organisational methods of the communities began to permeate and dominate our movement, to the degree that the leadership of the EZLN has become democratic in the indigenous manner.*

The CRIC-GC is organised through a delegate based democracy. It is composed of delegates from each town and community. It is responsible for the politics and organisation of the EZLN and is its highest authority. The decision to take up armed struggle came first and the CRIC-GC grew from this decision.

*So we decided that there is no way other than to organise and rise up like this in armed struggle. So we began to organise ourselves like that, secretly, in a revolutionary organisation. But, as it advanced, each people elected its representatives, its leaders. By making the decision in that way, the people themselves proposed who will lead these organisations. The people themselves have named us. So first, someone from each people has been named responsible. In that way we advanced town by town, so that there was time, then to name delegates. In that way we came to be the CCRI.*(7) Sub commander Marcos is answerable to the CRIC-GC but remains the leader when it comes to military matters.

The delegate based democracy on which the CRIC-GC is based is best explained by a young Zapatista Isaac "if some member of the CCRI does not do their work, if they do not respect the people, well compa it is not your place to be there. Then, well excuse us but we will have to put another in your place." This is how the community understand democracy and it is easy to see why they see no relation to what the 'democracy' the PRI currently exercise in Mexico.

The conditions these people find themselves in are harsh yet they can still operate a form of participatory democracy. This disproves the lie put forth by Leninists that in difficult conditions a dictatorship over the people must take place in 'their interests'. It comes as no surprise that the Zapatistas repeatedly deny being Marxists or Leninists as these forms of political ideology have difficulty with the idea of participatory democracy.

Through this democratic process the EZLN developed politics on a wide range of issues. For example the Women's revolutionary law supports the right of women to participate fully in the revolutionary struggle, control their own fertility, choose partners, and has regard to



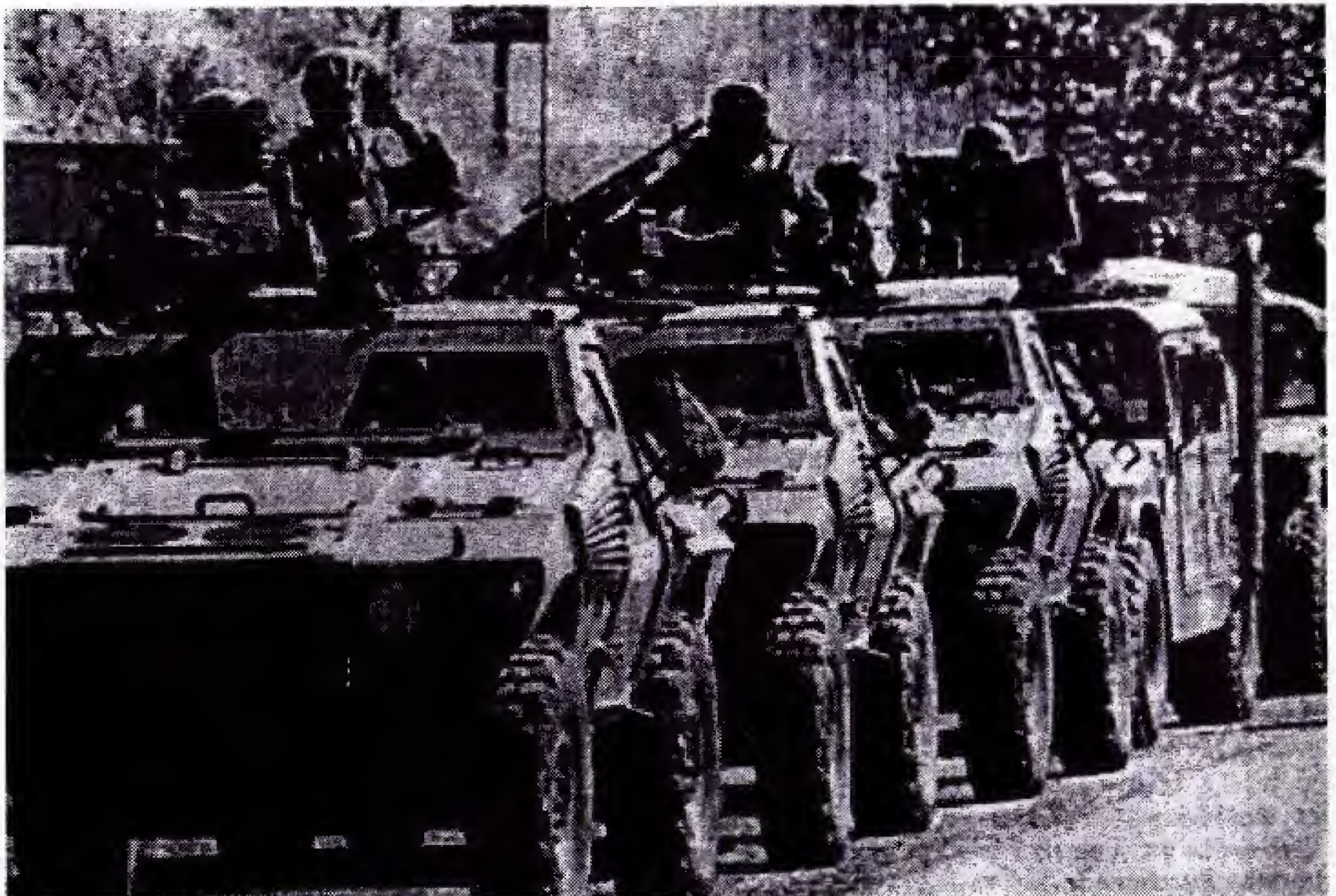


their health, education, and well being. This signifies a major advancement for women of the indigenous population. The peace proposal offered by the government was rejected by 97% of the people in the Zapatista controlled areas after consultation took place with all those over the age of 12.

In the negotiations with the Government, the EZLN put forward ten conditions which had to be met before a peace could be agreed. Many of these points for example the dissolution of the present government to be replaced by a transitional one until proper elections, were obviously not going to be met by the PRI. Also the EZLN demanded that NAFTA be revised. Within the core of Zapatista politics there seems to be an inherent flaw. On one hand they know that their demands will not be met by the authorities yet on the other hand, given this, the demands they make are watered down versions of their own political line. The question is when the Zapatistas were preparing their 10 point peace plan, what was their political strategy? Assuming that they knew the government would reject most of their points why didn't they include a fuller expression of their program. Perhaps they did have illusions in the government granting some of their demands, perhaps they felt that anything more radical would alienate the rest of the Mexican people, we don't know! These questions remain unanswered.

They claim to have learned from the guerrilla movements in Latin America. *Firstly, to greatly distrust the surrender of arms, and secondly not have confidence only in the electoral systems*(8). Yet this position seems to be contradicted by Marcos who refers to the *creation of a democratic space where the political parties, or groups that aren't parties, can air and discuss their social proposals*.(9) The point is explained further in a communique by the CCRI-CG in June where it says "*...this revolution will not end in a new class, faction of a class, or group in power. It will end in a free and democratic space for political struggle.*"

The EZLN are fighting a revolution for democratic space? Yet, the type of democracy which





they wish is not tolerated in any Western society and is unlikely to be permitted in Mexico unless revolution spreads throughout the country.

While it is obvious that no such space exists in Mexico, even the creation of some form of social democracy will not bring about the changes which the Zapatistas so desperately need. Social democracy does not provide liberty or justice. This call for social democracy contrasts with the beliefs which Marcos says exist amongst the people that *"they (politicians) are changing the leaves of the trees, but the roots are damaged... We say Let's uproot the tree and plant it again."* The tree will not be uprooted though the creation of social democracy.

However the options for the EZLN seem limited. Prior to the Presidential Elections in August they organised a National Democratic Convention (CND) which took place in the Lacandona jungle. This logistical miracle was attended by over 7,000 people(10). The conference was attended by many of the established voices of opposition to the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). Marcos said he wished to turn the CND into the leaders of civil society and that it should be they who decided how to respond to the PRI and the fraudulent State. Marcos presented democratic change as something which should come via peaceful means. The military solution would be adopted solely as a matter of last recourse(11) and only be tried when the CND decided upon it. Two weeks later the PRI presidential candidate went on to win the election amongst accusations of fraud. The creation of a democratic space through peaceful means to appears to have failed.

Mexico still needs to build a strong revolutionary movement. It will require greater numbers than the revolutionaries of the EZLN to destroy the rotten Mexican state. This difficult task, facing all the people who wish for change in Mexico, is made more difficult because of its dominant neighbour, the USA.

Within the EZLN, it seems, there is a widespread belief that their demands can only be met when as they say the tree is uprooted. They have developed a democratic structure from which ideas can flow and develop. They have struck out against the system which causes them so much death, pain and suffering. Support work has been done by the anarchist group 'Love and Rage' who have members in the USA and in Mexico. They have sent people down to Chiapas to ascertain the facts, organised translations of EZLN communiqués and helped in the production of a book on the EZLN. Here in Ireland we in the WSM have held a picket on the Mexican Embassy and handed in a letter of protest. This type of work though it may seem at first to be of minor importance, in fact ensures that the Mexican government knows that their actions are being monitored thus decreasing the likelihood of a government crackdown in the area.

The task facing Mexican revolutionaries is to spread their struggle and will for change to the cities and to the north of the Country. Although Marcos and the CCRI-GC are emphasising the role of the media, it is more important for the EZLN activists to win support on the ground.

In the United States activists must work on raising awareness of the EZLN amongst the resident Latino population. Pickets can be organised. Any struggle that remains isolated will face certain annihilation. It is the responsibility of all revolutionaries to ensure this will not happen.

The job of anarchists in Mexico is to spread their ideas and to share their experience as revolutionaries with the people of Chiapas. The Zapatistas have already rejected the ideas



of the authoritarian left. The demands of the EZLN for liberty, justice, and democracy will not be realised under capitalism. These demands have never arisen out of reform of any system in any country. Mexican anarchists should utilise the fertile ground that now exists for anarchist ideas in Chiapas.

What has happened in Chiapas is encouraging and needs to be supported. The revolutionaries of the EZLN, however, have not stumbled onto something new. The basic principle of participatory democracy is one of the foundation stones of anarchism. The EZLN deserve praise for the way they have integrated democracy into their struggle against the state. Now in Mexico where history stopped with the usurpation of power by the PRI seventy-five years ago, the people are still struggling towards having control over their own lives and destinies. True democracy needs to be established and implemented as part of the process of destroying the oppressive state which keeps all of us chained.

Dermot Sreenan (First published in Red & Black Revolution No. 1)

#### Footnotes

1 Article 27 in the Mexican Constitution is the one which promised agrarian reform. It was included in the constitution after the revolution and was always seen as the guarantee of similar land reforms as those Zapata implemented in his own region of Morelos during the revolution.

2 NAFTA will also drive down the prices paid for some of the basic crops produced by the indigenous people for their crops. The timing of the uprising was to coincide with the first day that NAFTA was supposed to take effect in Mexico.

3 Quoted from an Amnesty International Report.

4 Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's) are groups such as the Red Cross, Amnesty International,<sup>1</sup> etc.

5 Source Peter Martin Morelos who attended the National Democratic Convention and posted his report onto the internet. (24.9.94 Mexico's National Democratic Convention.)

6 Quoted from early newspaper coverage of events - listed in Chapter 2 - The first days.

7 Quoted from interview with Javier of the CCRI 3/2/94 in La Jornada.

8 Quoted from interview with Subcommander Marcos in La Jornada 4.2.94 - 7.2.94

9 Interview with Marcos 11 May '94

10 Attendance figure quoted from report by Peter Martin Morales.

11 Peter Martin Morales

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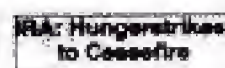
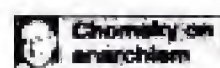
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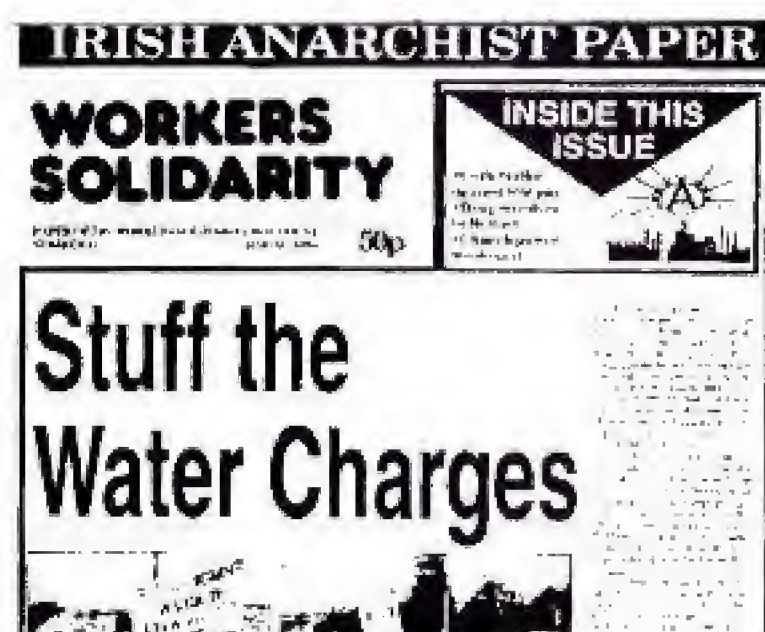
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# Interview with Subcomandante Marcos

Wednesday, May 11, 1994 Somewhere in la Selva Lacandona (the Lacandon Jungle)

This is an edited version of the english translation of part an interview that several other comrades from different alternative media conducted with Subcomandante Marcos, spokesperson for the EZLN, on May 11, 1994. Deletions have been made from the original text for reasons of space and clarity.

**Interviewers:** Much has been written and said about the Zapatistas, but little concrete is known about your ideology. There are many who are trying to claim your struggle as their own. The Maoists say that you are Maoists; the Trotskyites say that you are Trotskyites and the list goes on

**Marcos:** The anarchists say that we are anarchists . . .

**Interviewers:** No, we have never been able to say for sure [laughter]. We need proof. However, you have insisted that you are Zapatistas. Even now we remember the words of an EZLN Major who affirmed: *"We are not Marxists, nor are we guerillas. We are Zapatistas and we are an army."* Anti-authoritarianism is felt in each of your words and actions, in the manner in which you are organized, in the structure of the Clandestine Committees, in the collective participation (within the EZLN). In Mexico, the only precedents for your actions and attitudes go back precisely to those whose names you constantly evoke: Zapata and Mago'n. Has Magonismo permeated your ideology?

**Marcos:** This is a question?

**Interviewers:** [laughter]. No, a presentation.

**Marcos:** Well then, I'm going to explain. The EZLN was born having as points of reference the political-military organizations of the guerilla movements in Latin America during the sixties and seventies: That is to say, political-military structures with the central aim of overthrowing a regime and the taking of power by the people in general.

When the first group of the EZLN arrived here, to the jungles of Chiapas, it was a very small group with this political-military structure that I am talking about. It began to adapt itself to the surroundings, to try to survive - that is to say, to permeate the territory, to make it survivable. But, above all, it began to forge in the combatant, in that initial group of combatants, the physical and ideological strength needed for the guerilla process. I mean by this that the mountains served as a school for cadres, inflexible and constant day and night. But things were taking





shape. In this period there weren't cameras, there weren't recorders, there wasn't any press, nor were there military actions. The only thing that lets you stick to the mountains and endure is hope, because there isn't any payment. I'm not referring to monetary payment, of course there never was any of that, but to some moral payment, to something that would serve as some sort of assurance that it is all worth it.

Ten years ago, we were clinging to the hope that everything that we were learning, with much suffering and many problems, was going to have results someday. In that period, there is a double learning process: the learning process of the mestizos (the inhabitants of this area call everyone who lives in the city mestizo) and the process of the indigenous peoples. The process of the indigenous people includes learning the very basics - to speak Castilian [Spanish], the history of Mexico, reading and writing, basic notions of mathematics, geography, biology, chemistry - in all, everything that we mestizos have as our basic culture. And we for our part had to learn and understand not only the world view of the indigenous peoples of this zone, but also learn a series of physical aptitudes that are not innate to the indigenous peoples, but that they learn when they are small: to handle a machete, to carry large loads over long distances, to reduce their food intake to the minimum required - in this case corn and sugar.

In this interplay, this exchange, this give and take, we both went to the mountains changed. What I mean is that for the indigenous people the mountains are something sacred, something special, something magical and ultimately something terrible. No, the indigenous peoples do not go to the mountains. In fact, when we entered the mountains, many of them feared that something would happen to them before they could accomplish anything. The mountains are the place of the dead, of the gods, of good gods and bad gods, and because of this there was nobody who had experienced, not even on their part, life in the mountains. The indigenous people were only used to living in their villages, to going hunting, to searching for land where they could plant. We should talk about this romantic vision, if you understand me, of guerilla war, with its references to grandiose military actions: the taking of power and triumph, all of those things that could be references to the triumphant guerilla wars of that era, the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions.

The environment brings you back to reality and makes you understand that all revolutions have a cost and only those who are disposed to pay it can carry out the revolution. To begin with, in that time you had to be crazy or stupid to try to carry it out. I think that we were both stupid and crazy. There was nothing that would tell us that we were fine and that the venture was going to have a future or that it had a chance. There was the fact that we had tried to bring about change - not necessarily revolutionary change - by other methods and in different places. But all our struggles, our struggles in the university, peasant struggles, workers' struggles collided with the State, with Power.

It is better to speak about Power, because there are places in which the action of the State is not perfectly definable as such and it makes more sense to speak of Power - in this case, the Power of a dominant class that spreads to other areas, culture for example. Then you arrive at the conclusion, intuitively or scientifically, that another road is necessary, the road of armed struggle.

We then confronted the common belief that an armed revolution was possible in any country other than Mexico. That is to say, Mexico was considered the country of solidarity, but never the country of the revolution. When we proposed a revolution, we were considered heretics among the left. The left said that revolution wasn't Mexico's role, that we were too close to the United States, that the regime in Mexico resembled the European model and that because of this a revolutionary change was only possible by electoral methods, by peaceful methods, or, in the



most radical scenario, by insurrectional methods. This means that the unarmed masses, with broad mobilizations, would disrupt the economy and create a crisis in the State apparatus, which would then fall and a new government would take power. When we proposed a guerilla war, an armed struggle, we broke with this tradition, a tradition that was very strong during that time.

With what was happening in Nicaragua and what was beginning to happen in El Salvador, well ... Similar things had always been happening there but they were becoming more intense. The struggle in Guatemala was rejuvenating itself a second time, a third, a fourth. I don't know. Eventually someone said, And why not here in Mexico? Immediately, there was a sense of caution, of prudence, as if to say, Not here; here our role is to help those peoples that are liberating themselves and only later, eventually, Mexico might aspire to revolution. The fact that we broke with this idea implies that we also broke with other theoretical schema.

We were always confronted with the mountains. Let's say we survived that first stage, that this first stage was in effect about two things: surviving and beginning our political work. In this initial political work, a connection began to take place between the proposals of the guerilla group, the initial group of the EZLN, and the communities. This means that there are different expectations of the movement. On one hand, there were those who hoped that armed action would bring about a revolution and a change of power, in this case the fall of the governing party and the ascension of another party, but that in the end it would be the people who took power. On the other hand, there were the more immediate expectations of the indigenous people here. For them, the necessity of armed struggle was more as a form of defense against groups of very violent, aggressive and powerful ranchers. In addition, there was an approaching storm - no, let's not say approaching storm - as if there was a wall, a wall that was the same mountain that separated the jungle from the city and that separated the indigenous peoples from political power.

It was this wall that permitted the EZLN to grow so scandalously without anyone realizing to what point it had grown. The indigenous peoples realized the necessity of learning to defend themselves. They had weapons, but they used them only for hunting or to protect their homes from animals or thieves. Then, we found each other and we began to speak in two different languages, but in this common point of necessity of armed struggle a relationship began to

develop. They needed military instruction, and we needed the support of a social base. And we thus tried to convince them of the necessity of a broader political project. That didn't occur until elements of the community entered the army. In that moment, the difference between combatant force and civilian force began to disappear until it reached the point you see now when whole communities are Zapatistas, when there is no line that separates the civilians from the Zapatistas.

Then, when this began to occur, there began a confrontation, a relationship of convenience, between two ways of making decisions. On one hand, there was the initial proposal of the EZLN: a completely undemocratic and authoritarian proposal, as undemocratic and authoritarian as an army can be, since an army is the most authoritarian thing in this world and also the most absurd in that one single person can decide the life and death of his subordinates. On the other hand there was the indigenous





tradition that before the Conquest was a way of life and that after the Conquest became their only way of surviving. In other words, the communities, isolated, cornered, saw themselves obligated to defend themselves collectively, to live collectively, to govern themselves collectively.

Since the internal life of the communities was totally separated from national and local political forces, the important thing was the work done by the communities and because of this a collective government came about. No, it was always there: a way of making decisions in common about problems that affect the entire community. These decisions included decisions about work that had to be done in common, judicial problems at an internal level - because it isn't possible to appeal to judicial power of the State. What I mean to say is that the isolation of the indigenous communities provoked the development of another type of State, a State to deal with the survival of the collective, of a democratic collective with these two characteristics: The leadership is collective and it is removable.

In any moment, if you hold a position in the community (first, the community has to have appointed you independent of your political affiliation), the community can remove you. There isn't a fixed term that you have to complete. The moment that the community begins to see that you are failing in your duties, that you are having problems, they sit you down in front of the community and they begin to tell you what you have done wrong. You defend yourself and finally the community, the collective, the majority decides what they are going to do with you. Eventually, you will have to leave your position and another will take up your responsibilities.

So, on one hand there is this form of organization. I'm going to make a reference so that you understand better - student assemblies. Student assemblies are better as forms of protest or for analyzing problems. In the case of the indigenous communities, it is a way of life. On the other hand we have the authoritarian form of the army, of a political-military organization, but a military organization after all. One began to see a confrontation between these modes of decision-making until people from the communities began to join the EZLN and the indigenous form of decision-making began to take precedence.

I want you to understand me; we didn't arrive and say, It is necessary that the collective and democracy guide us. That isn't true, of course. This wasn't our conception. Our conception was vertical: What is necessary is a group of strong men and women, with ideological and physical strength, with the resistance to carry out this task. Our conception was that we were few but of high quality. Well, I'm not saying that we were of that high quality, but we sure were few.

Finally, I can't say exactly when - it's not something that's planned - the moment arrived in which the EZLN had to consult the communities in order to make a decision. At first, we only





asked if what we were doing was going to cause problems for the compañeros. And later, when we left the jungle and entered the mountains, we also entered the assemblies and discussions of the communities. A moment arrives in which you can't do anything without the approval of the people with whom you work. It was something understood by both parties: they understood that we wouldn't do anything without consulting them, and we understood that if we did anything without consulting them, we would lose them. And this flow, this



increase of men and women who left the communities in order to enter the mountains, made us realize that we couldn't draw a solid line between combatant forces and civilian forces.

Even geographically this line had broken down. There were military units that didn't live in the mountains but that instead lived in the communities and participated in communal labors. They gave military instruction, but they also participated in the work of the communities. When we reflect on this now it isn't a question of us and them - now we are the entire community. It was necessary to organize, to establish this collective authority along side the absurdity of a vertical, authoritarian structure. Then, it was possible to divide the process of making decisions. I mean by this that strategic decisions, important decisions have to be made democratically, from below, not from above. If there is going to be an action or series of actions that are going to implicate the entire organization, the authority has to come from below. In this sense, even the Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee isn't able to make every decision. You could say that the EZLN is different because in most political-military organizations there is only one commander, and in the EZLN the Clandestine Committees are composed of 80 people, 100 people, 120 people or however many. But this is not the difference.

The difference is that even the Clandestine Committees cannot make certain decisions, the most important decisions. They are limited to such a degree that the Clandestine Committees cannot decide which path the organization is going to follow until every compañero is consulted. In the EZLN a decision cannot be made until everyone is consulted, even if it appears that the majority of the compañeros have already decided for one of the options. Only after consulting everyone can the Committee say, *"We have asked everyone and this is the result."* The Committee cannot say, *"We consulted the majority and . . ."* This could cost you your life. You can't play games here.

In this way, we were not a guerilla group, but an army, an army with territory, with troops, with a general strategic plan. Our initial plan was a defensive plan, a plan in which the compañeros could participate in one of three different ways: as part of the

regular combat force that lives in the mountains, as part of the irregular combat force that lives and works in the communities, or as part of a reserve force composed of the elderly and children. These last also receive military training. At last, we were arrived to the point where we were able to mobilize five thousand people and concentrate them in a village as part of a



military exercise.

What was it that made this possible? A centralized command? No! Rather, it was that decisions of this kind were made by consensus or consultation. It is more than consultation; it is not a consultation in order to see what you think but more to ask, What do you want to happen? The purpose of this is to give power those who should have power.

Then, in this interweaving, in this exchange between two different forms of decision-making, the most orthodox proposals of Marxism or Leninism, theoretical concepts or historical references - for example, that the vanguard of the revolution is the proletariat, that the taking of state power and the installation of the dictatorship of the proletariat is the aim of the revolution - were confronted by an ideological tradition that is, how can I say this, somewhat magical. It is magical in one sense, but very real in another. What I mean by this is that it is an ideological tradition born of war - in this case, the war of the Conquest that began, well, not exactly five hundred years ago, and that continues through different historical periods. It continues . . . it continues, and it grows.

If we had been orthodox leftists, we would never have worked with indigenous peoples. Now, today, I believe there are many theories in crisis. Who would have thought that it would be the indigenous peoples who would provoke all of this? Not even in the Leninist conception of the weakest link was it thought that it might be the indigenous people, right? I told you that there was a learning process at the beginning of our work here, albeit a forced one. It's not like we said, Well, we are going to learn and see what happens. No! We were close-minded, like any other orthodox leftist, like any other theoretician who believes that he knows the truth.

**Interviewers:** Even in pure Marxism there is discrimination against indigenous people.

**Marcos:** Yes! Definitely. The events of this last January will bring changes at the theoretical level as well. We arrived here and we were confronted by this reality, the indigenous reality, and it continues to control us. Ultimately the theoretical confronted the practical, and something happened - the result was the EZLN. Therefore our combatants are right when they say, We are not Marxist- Leninists, we are Zapatistas. They are referring to this synthesis, this coming together, this compatibility that incorporates - I'm going to be very schematic - the historical traditions of struggle and resistance of indigenous people and the necessity of a national revolution.

**Interviewers:** Excuse me for interrupting. This is exactly the meaning of the initial question: whether you believe that Magonismo has permeated the Zapatista movement. Let's look at the history of the Mexican revolution, in which Mago'n, who was also a descendent of indigenous people, of indigenous parents in Oaxaca, had a similar vision. He took into account the needs of the indigenous peoples and didn't limit himself to saying, Those poor indians! but also assumed the responsibility of analyzing how to create an army with indigenous bases, an army with a collective participation in the command structures. This is the point of the first question: do you believe that Magonismo has permeated the ideological formation of the EZLN?

**Marcos:** Look, I have to be honest. When we talk about Magonismo, it also makes me think of the orthodox line, close-minded and stupid. This is the truth. The Mago'n brothers are only talked about in the context of the labor movement, although we know that they developed many other important projects as well. But, ultimately, the unintentional result is that they are talked of in this. We referred to the Flores Mago'n brothers in order to highlight the need for the workers to participate in the revolution, and in order to highlight an important force that existed during the time previous to the outbreak and spread of the armed struggle in 1910-21.

Ultimately, this synthesis or confrontation that I am speaking of occurred in such a way that the



EZLN was born without any links to the workers. I think that perhaps the synthesis was not enough. Probably it could have used more influence from Mago'n. It probably lacked more input from the history of the Mexican worker's movement so as to be able to truly incorporate the workers into the armed struggle. I'm not saying that we didn't consider this on a theoretical level, but evidently in practice nothing happened. This is to say that there was an error, not in the reality - I can't say, Reality is stupid because it doesn't suit what I am thinking. It means that we were stupid because we didn't understand reality.

**Interviewers:** In this sense, the Zapatista movement and the Zapatista revolution have been called the first postmodernist revolution. Now, let's analyze the fact that many current theories of the new left, of an anti-authoritarian left with a definite tendency toward libertarian communism, break with the blueprint that sees the working class as the vanguard of the social revolution. Many of these new theories even see the working class as a class in decline, a class that does not recognize itself as a class, a class that less and less wants to be considered the working class. Is this conception of the working class one that you have adopted during your experiences?

**Marcos:** No, definitely not. Those idols against which we were fighting were different. The idea that armed struggle was possible in all places except Mexico was so omnipresent that we were obligated to confront it first and leave the rest for later. Beyond this, in historical or theoretical terms, who would have speculated before December 31, 1993 that it wasn't going to be the proletariat leading the revolution. Then who? Who was it going to be? They could have speculated that it would be the teachers, they could have speculated that it would be the unemployed, they could have speculated that it would be the students or some sector of the middle class, they could have speculated that it would be leftist or democratic factions within the Federal army or within the supposedly democratic faction of the PRI. They could have speculated many things, including that the United States would become socialist and then they





would invade us and make us socialists [laughter]. This was the reasoning then. Even in the university this idea had taken root.

It didn't occur to anyone that the indigenous peoples were going to play this role and that they would manage to demand their place in the nation or that they would demand that the nation recognize that they have a proposal, that they have a proposal for the nation. The same or better or worse - it's open for discussion - as any other proposal that intellectuals or political parties or social groups have for this country.

**Interviewers:** We don't want to deviate much from the questions that we planned to ask you, but now that you have brought up the term Nation. . . There have been many discussions regarding this concept. Even within the discussions of postmodernism the term Nation continues to be marked by a petit-bourgeoise conception. The Nation is used as an abstract feeling of a patriotism that ultimately does nothing more than pit us against one another, country against country. And in this sense, we have felt a certain distance, for example, between points such as the autonomy of the indigenous peoples and the national proposals of which you speak. We would like it if you could tell us a little of the vision of which you speak. When you refer to your national proposals, is it with this bourgeoisie vision of the nation-state-fatherland, or are you merely using a language a little, well, we could say, more common - something more direct and easier to understand?

**Marcos:** When we speak of the nation we are necessarily speaking of history, of a history of common struggle with historical references that make us brothers to one group of people without distancing us from other groups. But what more do we have in common with the history of what is today called Mexico? I say this because the first accusation against Zapatismo is that it is aligned with Central America. Therefore it has to delineate itself and explain that its vision is not directed towards the south, but rather towards the north. That is to say, to that historical tradition which has brought it together with a group of people - in this case with the Mexican people, not with the Central American peoples. Because. . . remember that the other thing being said is that this revolution is the last Central America revolution. Some say it is the first postmodern revolution, others say that it is the last Central America revolution, even geographically speaking.

What occurs as a result of this insistence. . . when the concept of autonomy is brought up, the State understands it in this way: Well, what the indigenous peoples want are reservations, like the ones North American indians have. This is where the companeros say, No, if we are going to end up like the North American indians on reservations, no. This is not the concept of autonomy that we want, rather that they recognize, for example, this structure of government that I have explained, a structure that gives us validity. We don't want them to operate as if they were conquering territory.

When the Federal army entered the communities before the war, or the judicial police or the public security police, or the municipal police, they entered as an invading army in enemy territory, even physically. When an army invades a country, everyone from that country is an enemy. When they entered the communities, they entered acting as if everyone were an enemy. At that point, the companeros said, We have our own forms of government, we have traditions of community decision-making that must be respected by the government. And not only that - these traditions are a good example for the national government, for the government of this country, for any government that pretends to be a democracy.

For this reason we speak of Mexico, of the Mexican nation, because we must mark our boundaries, we must say, It is not nostalgia for Central America, it is not nostalgia for Nicaragua, nostalgia for El Salvador. On the other hand, when they speak of autonomy they are



speaking as sectarians. They don't look to the future but to the past, the nostalgia. . . They look to ethnicity in a pejorative sense, as if we wanted to create a bubble, a bubble like the one in the movie, a bubble that isolates you from contamination or from what happens outside it. Therefore, any concept that you put out there. . . We must make clear what we are speaking of in all senses.

**Interviewers:** From our point of view. . . We felt a little shocked by the discrepancy in your positions. For example, what is put forward as the nation of Mexico we understand to be very similar to what indigenous peoples understand to be the nation of the United States. It is a large nation that dominates a large number of indigenous peoples, of small indigenous nations. In this case they may be Choles, Tzotziles, Triquis, Yaquis. The same thing happens in the case of the United States. It is a large nation that has oppressed a large number of small nations, such as the Yaquis, the Pomos, the Apaches, the Dakotas, etc. And in this sense we understand Mexico to be an imperialist nation that has kept all of these peoples oppressed without recognizing their culture, their traditions, their identities, a nation that has imposed a culture and an identity and that is trying to maintain the entire territory under its control without the least respect for cultures, traditions, identities or anything of the kind.

This then we see as a kind of contradiction, speaking of a national project. . . Well, we can see it in history with the example of Lazaro Cardenas when he was in the army. He went to war against the Yaqui, no? And this was to massacre and oppress the Yaqui people, a people who were in rebellion and who had not allowed themselves to be oppressed, a people who were one of the bastions of resistance against the so-called New Nation. Therefore, we see a contradiction. I don't know if you have given thought to this, if you have come across this contradiction in your experiences.

**Marcos:** No, this is your position, but since this is my interview, I am going to explain ours. Look, we believe that today's Mexico, the Mexico that we are fighting against, is not a Mexico in abstract but rather a project of a certain class, of a certain social group. This project was born of the disorder or of the internal agreement provoked by the revolution at the beginning of this century. The implementation of this project has brought about a series of things as you indicate: domination, questions of land, of forms of government. For example, the lie that there is a federation when in reality the states depend upon the central government, or the lie that there are free municipalities when in reality the municipalities are dependent.

We believe that it is possible to have the same Mexico with a different project, a project that recognizes not only that it is a multi-ethnic state - in fact, multi-national - but also that new concepts are needed in order to reform the constitution. But, since there isn't a just relationship between the federation and its parts, we are proposing autonomy. We are proposing this because we are mostly indigenous people but what we say with respect to the need for autonomy could be applied equally to the municipalities, to the unions, to social groupings, to peasant groups, to the governments of the states or to the states that are nominally free and sovereign inside the federation.

**Interviewers:** Could it be said that you view the future society for which you are fighting as one in which the free municipality, the autonomous municipality will be put into practice, a society in which a federation will be put into practice based upon a citizen's confederation?

**Marcos:** No, before this we have to complete the other revolution. The EZLN. . . The revolution that we are proposing isn't an indigenous revolution. The EZLN was born with indigenous demands due to how it developed, but it aspires to organize the workers, non-indigenous peasants, students, teachers, and all of the other social sectors in order to carry out a broader revolution, not just an indigenous revolution.





We don't believe that the result of this revolution that we are proposing will be a new world, a new country; it will only be a first step, an antechamber that you enter before you enter this new country. We are proposing a space, an equilibrium between the different political forces in order that each position has the same opportunity to influence the political direction of this country - not by backroom deals, corruption or blackmail, but by convincing the majority of the people that their position is best. I mean by this... If there is a neoliberal proposal for the country, we shouldn't try to eliminate it but confront it. If there is a Trotskyite proposal, a Maoist proposal, an anarchist proposal, or proposals from the Guevaristas, the Castristas, the Existentialists or whateverists that you may think of, they shouldn't be eliminated.

They shouldn't be discussed in the way we are discussing them now, in small groups. In this discussion, we

are demonstrating that we know a lot, that we speak very prettily, but in the discussions that we are proposing... the rest of the country shouldn't be spectators, like they will be to the debate tomorrow [On May 12, for the first time in Mexican history, the presidential candidates of the major Mexican political parties engaged in an open, televised debate - translators]. The people have to decide what proposal to accept, and it's the people who you have to convince that your opinion is correct. This will radically change the concept of revolution, of who the revolutionary class is, of what a revolutionary organization is. Now, the problem isn't in fighting against the other proposals, but instead in trying to convince the people. It's because of this that the Zapatista revolution isn't proposing the taking of power, it isn't proposing a homogeneous ideological concept of revolution.

We are saying that yes, we do have our idea of how the country should be, but something is lacking before we talk about this. We cannot replicate the same logic as the government. They have a vision for the country that they have imposed on the people with the arms of the Federal Army. We cannot reverse this logic and say that now the Zapatista vision is going to be imposed on the people with the arms of the Zapatista army. We are saying, Let's destroy this State, this State system. Let's open up this space and confront the people with ideas, not with weapons. This is why we propose democracy, freedom and justice - justice in order that certain material conditions are satisfied so that people have an opportunity to participate in the political life of the country. We are saying, We don't want this new world yet. We are not talking about a new world yet. We aren't talking about what form Article 27 should take. We aren't talking about what form the federation agreement should take. We aren't talking about what form indigenous autonomy should take. We are talking about a democratic space where the political parties, or groups that aren't parties, can air and discuss their social proposals.



**Interviewers:** Marcos, in analyzing the way in which you are organized - at least what you have let us see - it's evident that when you speak of democracy, you are referring to direct democracy, to total participation, to a participation in which each and every person that makes up this country, everyone that is living at this time in Mexico, can participate. Is this interpretation accurate?

**Marcos:** Yes. Definitely. Look, what we are trying to do. . . We are a clandestine organization that has taken up arms against the government, and still we are very careful to try and maintain this democracy. By this I mean the direct vote, everyone's vote. Yes, because only the Zapatistas can vote. It's not the kind of process where you arrive and ask the people, Are you for war or are you for peace? Well, I'm for war. And you? Peace. And you go adding up the votes.

No, I tell you that it must be the logical outcome of community discussion. The people meet in assemblies and the representatives put forth, for example in the case of the consultations, the demands of the EZLN and the response of the government. They're explained. What is it that we asked for and what has the government said in response? And they begin to debate, Well, this is bad and this is good. After the community says, We have already debated, we already understand, now we can vote - this could take days. In fact, almost all the consultations have gone on for two, three days now and they haven't yet reached the point of voting. They arrive and say, Well okay, we are in agreement, let's vote if we are ready to vote, if we already understand what it is we are going to decide. It's not about raising your hand or putting a checkmark for one option or the other. You have to debate and analyze the pros and the cons.

In this case you're not voting for a governor where he could turn out to be a son of a bitch, you're voting for your life or death as an organization. If you're at war you already know that you could live or die. But, if you err in a decision and you vote for war when it is time for peace or you vote for peace when it is time for war, you disappear as an organization. You might disappear because they destroy you, because you lose prestige or moral authority, or because you become a traitor to yourself by signing a fictitious peace that nobody wants. You can't leave decisions of this magnitude to a group of leaders no matter how collective they are or how large the group is. Not even the Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee can decide these things. The Committee can't meet and decide, We analyzed what Camacho [Commissioner for Peace and Reconciliation in Chiapas - translators] said and we are going to decide yes or no. They can't do that.

**Interviewers:** Do you strive for consensus in the general assemblies?

**Marcos:** No, there is direct voting. It isn't the sort of voting where at the end they say, The majority of the people voted yes and therefore it's yes for all the people. No, it has to be known how many said yes and how many said no, because these yeses and nos are added up proportionally. It's not the consensus of the government, for example, that says, Well, nobody said no [laughs] so we have consensus. Are you in agreement? Nobody said they didn't agree so that means that you agree. No, it has to be a direct vote.

**Interviewers:** [...] It's been made clear during the interview that the EZLN has never considered itself to be the vanguard of the Mexican revolutionary movement.[...] PROCUP [Partido Revolucionario Obrero Clandestino - Unio'n del Pueblo], have said that they are the vanguard of Zapatismo, that they as a party are the vanguard of Zapatismo. [...] Is this true? [..]

**Marcos:** The left is very close-minded. The traditional left is very close-minded. They say, Well, these people don't draw from any of the known ideologies, so they must not have one. I will lend them one. [laughs]. Or they say, They are good people but they don't know what they want. I'm going to tell them what they want. Or They're good people but they need a leader. I'll be their



leader. This is the reality not just in the case of PROCUP, but with groups of Trotskyites and Maoists who say, What the EZLN needs is. . .ME! [laughs].

**Interviewers:** My leadership.

**Marcos:** Yes, ultimately, my leadership. What upsets the Pentagon is that when you punch Zapatista into the computer, nothing comes out that says, Moscow, or Havana, or Libya, Tripoli, Bosnia or any other group. And the left, accustomed to the same way of thinking, says, Well, they don't fit in anywhere. It doesn't occur to them there might be something new, that you have to retheorize. And they say, Well then, these poor people don't know what they want, we need to help them. And furthermore, we are talking about an armed force at war, surrounded, that isn't able to receive all the declarations or the newspapers. Eventually, we find out what is said after a week or maybe 15 days. So, they know that we will not be able to deny it. We can't stop it.

But, we believe that. . .we have confidence in the people, in the community, in that we have been clear about our positions and that people will have difficulty swallowing that we are the armed arm of PROCUP or of any other organization of any type. But I have seen various magazines. . .of Trotskyites and Maoists, of all of the orthodox leftists and of the old dinosaurs that say, Well, the ELZN is very good and what they've done is very good and all, but they lack a program, so here's a program. They lack a party, so here's a party. They lack a leader, so here's a leader. This attitude is held by everyone from Aguilar Talamantes [Presidential candidate of the Partido Frente Cardenista de Reconstrucio'n Nacional - translators] to the left.

[....]

**Interviewers:** Going back to the previous discussion, Dr. Armando Quiro'z Alejandro of the ANDH [Asemblea Nacional de Derechos Humanos] met with comrades of the Zapatista Solidarity Committee in New York City. During the visit, he insinuated in private discussions with these comrades that PROCUP has a link to the EZLN and furthermore that the EZLN is following the same political line as PROCUP.

**Marcos:** It's not true, those people need to be publicly denounced. It can't be. Why should the Zapatistas provide the dead bodies and the other groups collect the dollars and fool people into thinking that they're providing solidarity for an organization that never receives any of this aid? We don't subscribe to their ideologies - in this case the ideology of PROCUP. We definitely don't subscribe. . .If we subscribed to the ideology of PROCUP, well, we would be PROCUP. We are not, we are not in anyway in league with them, we have not even entered in any kind of conversation with them since our inception, since their inception. There is absolutely no type of alliance. Well, in the sense that we are all human beings, you could also [laughs] link us to Clinton or to Reagan, to Perot, to Che, to Zapata.

**Interviewers:** A number of very biased press sources have tried to equate the EZLN with the Shining Path [Communist Party of Peru - Shining Path - translators]. Making a simply objective analysis you can see that both groups are very different. For example, while the Shining Path has committed innumerable executions, you [the EZLN] tried a criminal like Absalom [former governor of Chiapas taken prisoner by the Zapatistas during the January fighting - translators] and you put him to work in the corn fields and in the end you freed him. We would like it if you could expound on this because there are Maoists who say that you part of the international Maoist revolution, that there is a link between the Shining Path and the Zapatista Army, etc., etc.

**Marcos:** No, there is no link. Look, if the Mexicans couldn't accept that an armed revolution was possible in Mexico, definitely foreigners couldn't accept the possibility. Come on, everyone saw





or still sees Mexico as the rearguard for political solidarity work. Now I'm remembering something; let's see if this relates to the question - it will make the tape recorder jump. We just received a feminist magazine that says that we are sexists because we chose war and war is sexist, armies are in and of themselves sexist, so therefore the EZLN is sexist. Therefore, what the EZLN needs is to be feminist. The article was brilliant - it moved me to tears. I don't remember what it was called - it was written by pure feminists.[ . .]the foreward says, Only for Zapatista women. And I disobeyed and read it, but I will pass it along to the companeras.

**Interviewers:** Well, one of the things that we are most concerned about - specifically the companeras - are the gender politics within the EZLN. You facilitated our being able to interview a number of companeras and we have seen - to the point that you have allowed us to see [laughs] - that there exists an equality. This can be seen clearly. The women say it themselves: My partner, - or in the case of those who

are married - My husband washes his things, does his work, does his part. And when you ask her if she has children, she says, Yes, I already have mine, my M-16. Things like this show that yes, there is an equality that exists, at least in practice. The single companeras that we've interviewed also tell us they do the same work as the men, that they aren't limited to working as nurses or in the kitchen as a result of being women. We would like you to tell us, as spokesperson of the EZLN: What are the politics of the EZLN towards gender issues?

**Marcos:** Look, there are many problems. I am speaking of the companeras. . . above all in the civilian population, the civilians have continued practicing many ancestral customs that don't belong in even a pre-revolutionary situation. For example, many still believe that the man should choose the woman that he wants to marry, but that the woman should have no choice in the matter. The difference, including the physical difference, between the civilian women and the combatant women is very clear. At the age when many of the combatant women have, as you say, an M-16, many civilian women already have four or five children, are beaten by their husbands; they don't know how to read or write, they have no opportunity to develop themselves as people. What the companeras say is that they cannot have their equality decreed from above, they have to achieve it through struggle. They say, You can like it or not, but now we are going to change these things. By force.

That's why in our list of demands to the government, it doesn't mention anything about gender. The companeras say, We aren't going to ask the government to give us freedom, nor are we going to ask you male fools. We are going to ensure our freedom, our respect and our dignity as women and as human beings. I'm speaking of the companeras. . . They also criticize us, the men, for our sexist or authoritarian attitudes. For example, in relationships between combatants, many things have changed, things that haven't changed in the civilian population. For example, in the civilian population, when a woman marries, she is no longer allowed to dance. She is married, and dances are places where single people meet and decide to get married. If



she is married, then she doesn't dance because now she is somebody's property. Amongst the civilians it is still this way. Amongst the combatants, no, the combatants dance whether they are married or single, and it is very common that the woman chooses her dancing partner. They dance just to dance, to have fun, without any other motive such as to sleep with someone or have a relationship.

[...]among the regular forces. . . There isn't a politic of gender, there are only combatants. There are women soldiers and there are men soldiers, but in the end they are soldiers. In order to rise to a command position, in order to rise in rank or to carry out actions and missions, we take into account the soldier's aptitudes; it doesn't matter whether they are male or female. Many times, in our daily life as combatants, in couple relationships, sexist attitudes are reproduced and because of this our laws tend to favor the woman. It is very common for couples to fight physically when they fight. Let's say that the difference between the women combatants and civilian women is that the women combatants hit back [laughter].

**Interviewers:** They defend themselves.

**Marcos:** Yes, it's common that it's the man who comes to us complaining that his partner hit him. We have to be very cautious in this respect because both are armed, if it occurs to one of them to shoot the other. . . A blow is much different than a gunshot. For us - for me it's very clear, and I believe that it's clear to many companeras as well - that equality isn't something that's conceded. You can't say, I as a man am going to give you your freedom and now we are going to be equal. That's not true, of course. In the same way, the government can't concede us our rights as indigenous peoples, we have to fight for them.

The women are also fighting for them, many times in very radical ways. I believe that they've achieved many things inside the combat forces and inside the civilian population. For example, men who had never received orders from a women, who couldn't stand it when women would give them orders in the mountains. . . When they saw them fighting, they saw that the companeras knew how to fight. They look on them with respect now because they realized that the women knew how to fight and they didn't. They saw them facing death and they stopped being women. They stopped being women in the classic sense of the term, weak and unable to.

..

**Interviewers:** Women in the pejorative sense.

**Marcos:** It could be also that you see a women and you think that she's only there to sleep with. But when it changes to, She's going to give me orders and I have to obey her, or I'm going to give her orders and she is going to obey me, in that moment you stop being a female combatant or a male combatant and you become a soldier, equals. I'm not saying that the women stop being women and become men, but that both women and men stop being what they are and become combatants. Since we are soldiers all the time - we aren't able to take vacations - it is very difficult to tell when one is acting in the role of combatant and when one is off-duty. I believe that this has brought more benefits to the companeras than to the sexists, to us men, in the sense that this equality in combat, in work is transmitted to other aspects of life.

**Interviewers:** Do you accept the analysis that we live in a patriarchal society, that men have controlled society for centuries and that this is also part of the system that feeds Capital, that feeds the bourgeoisie?

**Marcos:** Definitely! There are companeros who are very revolutionary politically, but who are real assholes in relationships, in marriages, in relationships between men and women. But, I believe that changes in this aren't going to be our concession - I'm speaking as a man. The women are going to change things whether we like it or not, despite our close-mindedness. It



is the same thing as we are doing with respect to the government. The government doesn't like the fact that the indigenous peoples have risen up, but we did it. The sexists don't like the fact that the women are doing what they are doing, but they are going to do it and that's that. They have fought in combat, they even won. Some of them led successful missions, they won, they defeated men. They commanded entire units of men. The EZLN is composed of about two-thirds men and one-third women. It is very common to have military units where the only woman is the commander; the entire unit, all of her subordinates are men. This caused many problems before January first.

**Interviewers:** Continuing along this same subject. . . We have seen that there is also a cultural difference, a difference in tradition. You said this also, at the beginning when you spoke of your links to the indigenous communities. Many of the companeras have told us that they aren't allowed to have sex until they are married, that there is a regulation that says that they must be married. If they like a man and they want to sleep with him, it's easier to marry him. We're not speaking of a religious marriage, but that you, the EZLN, expediate some form of marriage. . . But we feel this to be a little puritanical, as if to say, You can't have sex because you are a woman and you have to be married.

**Marcos:** No, no, it's that marriage for us means that you are a couple and you have permission. Let me explain. When you are going to have a sexual relationship. . . During the day you can't have sex, you're working. The most logical thing is that you are going to sleep with someone at night. You have to advise the commander that you are going to be having sex somewhere, because if you are attacked the commander has to look for you and. . . We tell the combatants, You have to trust the commanders to tell them that you are sleeping with someone. Why? It doesn't matter to me, I'm not going to watch you, I'm not a voyeur. It isn't like that. What I'm interested in is that I have someone covering your position. If we are attacked, we can't have the entire defensive line having sex. Well, it could happen, but it shouldn't happen. We don't demand that they are married.

**Interviewers:** They can have sexual relations freely?

**Marcos:** In fact, they have sex and then they say, Well, not this one. Or Yes, this is the one I want to marry. Or maybe I don't want to marry this person, but I just want it to be clear that we are a couple. They say this to avoid gossip - like that he or she gets in bed with one person and then another, and so on.

**Interviewers:** That involves culture and tradition as well.

**Marcos:** Yes, we are talking about indigenous people that come from the villages. . .

**Interviewers:** In the Revolutionary Womens Law [One of the revolutionary laws promulgated by the EZLN in the liberated territories - translators] it is stated explicitly that a woman has full rights over her body and her life. What is the proposal of the Zapatistas in relation to





the legalization of abortion? And the second question is: At this time, if a companera becomes pregnant because her contraceptive method fails and she does not wish to carry the pregnancy to term, if she wants to interrupt it, does she have authority over her body in order to decide if she aborts or not?

**Marcos:** The EZLN demands that the state's penal code be modified because there is no political freedom. The government, taking advantage of the fact that we are tied up in talks and that we are surrounded, is taking the opportunity to reverse the decriminalization of abortion that existed in the Penal Code. They say that this is at the EZLN's request, but the EZLN did not request the modification of the Code in that respect. The stupidity of this article is based on the argument that this is a position of Samuel Ruiz Garcia, that it evidences the influence of the church on the EZLN, and since the church is against abortion they want it to be penalized. Then, according to the argument, the church directed us to present this law proposal. We have not presented any law proposal or anything of the kind - nor a electoral reform proposal or anything like that either. The proposal says contextually: We demand that the Penal Code of the state be eliminated. We don't say that it should be reformed or replaced by a more just one. We demand that it be removed because it leaves us no other form of political participation other than taking up arms. That's what it says. I sent a letter to La Jornada because of that stupid article that was published.

That answers the first question. Question two: the companera not only has the right to terminate the pregnancy, but the organization also has the obligation to provide the means for her to do it with total safety.

If she says, I have become pregnant - it could even be that she became pregnant on purpose, not just that the birth-control method failed - but I don't want it anymore, this is fine, as long as her life is not in danger; I mean, if a certain number of months have gone by it can't be done. Then she can demand by the right of Zapatista law that the EZLN give her the means to terminate the pregnancy under the best health conditions that the EZLN can ensure. It is the obligation of the commanders that she is given these means. If the pregnancy can't be stopped, aborted, then the commanders have to find the way to resolve the problem.

**Interviewers:** In this case, for free.

**Marcos:** It is not in the strictest sense control over their bodies and the companeras demonstrate this very clearly, We are not free in this sense because, for example, I can't become pregnant and continue to serve in the army. In this sense I am not free. I am free in that if I am pregnant I can stop the pregnancy, but if I am not pregnant I can't decide to become pregnant, because if I become pregnant I have to leave the army. And yes, we do tell them they have to leave the army, because of the conditions we face. That's why the companeras say, There is no freedom over my own body. In the case of the female combatants it is only half-freedom, the other freedom is lacking. Right now they can't decide to carry a pregnancy to term and remain in the army. It is only fair to point this out, and the companeras continue to fight for their right to become pregnant. The other side of the issue has already been resolved for many years and we deal with abortions with the means we have at our disposal. Until now no one has died during an abortion. In the communities abortion is practiced to the extent that our resources allow.

**Interviewers:** Then it exists also for the civilian population, for the women in the civilian community. There is that possibility in case she needs it, if she so wishes.

**Marcos:** Yes. In general, they don't seek it because of their beliefs; also for health reasons, since in their nutritional conditions an abortion can be deadly. Sometimes it is best to let the pregnancy be carried through, even if there is still time for an abortion. But we do facilitate the





use of contraceptives and all that, for example.

**Interviewers:** The companeras we met also had access to contraceptives. The question has been raised of whether there is the possibility for the organization of women's groups within the army where women could organize as women of the army but also autonomously as women. By this we mean self-help collectives where they could gain and acquire more knowledge about their bodies....

**Marcos:** [...] The most we managed to achieve some time ago - when I was captain - many years ago, was to have sex-education classes, explaining the man's body, the woman's body, what was the mechanism of pregnancy, what things were going on in their bodies. This was received with much enthusiasm from the men, and much embarrassment from the women. The men came to see how a woman's body was. For example - look, this town has a power plant project that breaks down all the time, but when it works... some months ago it

worked for few days. One of the companeros told us, very enthusiastically, that at last he had seen his wife. He said, I finally saw all of her. And they have ten kids. He had ten kids and he didn't know his wife's body. He didn't know his wife's body! Until there was electric light and they thought of making love with the light on, and then yes, he could see everything that was going on. And he talked about it as if it had been his first time. He already had ten children, one of them fully grown, already an insurgent [combatant in the EZLN - translators], an 18 year-old, a member of a combat unit.

We organized these classes in order to combat the diseases that afflict the women, so that they understand the necessity of hygiene. It is a problem for them; the men don't take it into account. They think that when a companera has a urinary-tract infection, from lack of cleanliness for example - or if she has her period - that she is just lazy, that she doesn't want to work. We need to sensitize the men to this so that they understand that a woman's body is not like a man's, in many senses. And that's why we organized these classes. We try in the talks and lectures to address these issues.

**Interviewers:** Is there an education as far as the use of the condom- not only as a contraceptive but also to avoid diseases, to avoid contracting and spreading them?

**Marcos:** No, in reality no. In reality, we teach about the condom as a contraceptive when the companeras can't use the pill, when they get sick from the pill. There are many who get ill from the pill, they are very young; when they use pills with high estrogen content they get sick. With all the heavy work they do already they get nauseous, get headaches and all that - it's very hard on them. They can't always get IUDs, the rhythm method is really prehistoric, so then there is the use of condoms. But we should say that the Zapatistas' sexual horizons are very limited. I mean by this that gonorrhea, and things of this sort... well, we didn't get a chance to catch them in the cities since we fled before attacking the whorehouses.



We are in the mountain, we are at war - within the regular troops, I'm saying, it is very, very difficult to spread diseases. In fact, we have not seen one case. And we can instill fear, in fact we did it, and they tell you, Not me, I have never been with a woman, where am I going to become infected, or in what whorehouse am I going to catch this? It's more pragmatic in that sense. I am not saying it is good, because I do think that it would be good to promote their use. . . but no, we haven't done it, I would lie to you if I said that we were doing it. It is recommended when. . . as a contraceptive, not for sexual hygiene.

**Interviewers:** Well, in case that this kind of sexual education could be resumed. . . do you believe that it would be acceptable that the problem of disease, in the case of AIDS, etcetera, be included in the instruction?

**Marcos:** I believe so. Let's say that we understand, for example, about AIDS. Well, according to the information that we were getting when we were in the mountains AIDS is a homosexuals' disease, and therefore, if you weren't a homosexual, nothing would happen to you. In fact, we just found that you can get AIDS in other ways, it can be transmitted even in heterosexual relationships. I am talking about the basic sexual culture here, because in this case all references to AIDS are in the context of homosexuality: If I'm not homosexual I have nothing to worry about. The main worry here is different: What I have to worry about is to not get anyone pregnant, or that no one gets me pregnant. No, we don't have a sexual culture based on fear of disease due to our isolation, but yes, we do need educate about it.

**Interviewers:** Now, relating the answers with other questions. . . One of the questions that we were asked to ask by companeros Mateo and Robin is what is the EZLN's policy, in the army and in the liberated communities, toward sexual preference, in this specific case, homosexuality and lesbianism. Is the EZLN given to the satanization of homosexuality that has sometimes been found in other leftist groups? Or is it simply unknown what you are talking about when you attempt to address these issues?

**Marcos:** No, let's say that at a level of, well, of basic culture, it is not punished. I mean, they don't say, He's a homosexual, put him in jail, kill him. On one hand, they laugh, make jokes, but homosexuals have a normal life in the community. Our position as an army is that - let me put it to you in a general way - there are many minorities that will have to say, Enough is enough! Just as the indigenous people said, Enough is enough!, other minorities not tolerated by the powerful will have to say it also. In that sense, then, there is no sexual policy in the Zapatista Army.

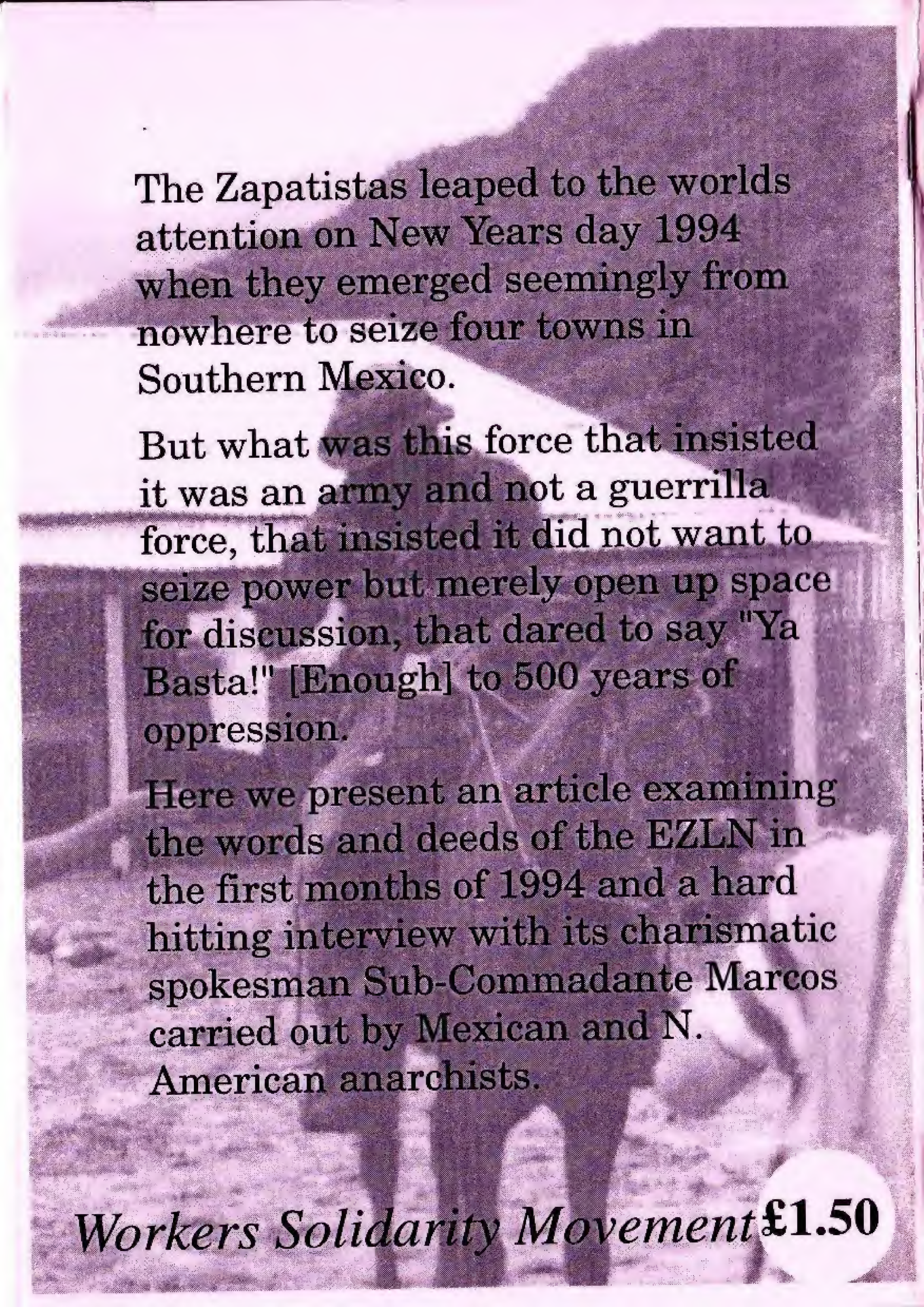
**Interviewers:** There is no policy in the army that says, We found two girls fucking or two guys fucking and well. . . they are jailed, suspended, expelled - I don't know. . .

**Marcos:** No, there is nothing like that. They go ask the commanders, the same as when it is a male-female couple. That means, they let us know they are not going to be at their posts, because that is what the commanders are concerned about, that their position is covered.

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The Zapatistas leaped to the worlds attention on New Years day 1994 when they emerged seemingly from nowhere to seize four towns in Southern Mexico.

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